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The Soviet Leadership and the Struggle for Political Reform

by Archie Brown

No one should be in any doubt that the present time in the Soviet Union is one of political struggle between pro-reform and conservative forces. Indeed, one of the more notable departures from past practice has been the abandonment, in effect, of the myth of the monolithic unity of the Communist party. Gorbachev himself, while observing at the February 1988 plenum of the Central Committee that the struggle "does not take the form of class antagonisms," has described it, nonetheless, as "acute."¹ Earlier this year, the prominent Soviet writer and economic reformer, Nikolai Shmelev, warned that "we are witnessing a stepping-up of resistance by conservative forces" and expressed concern that "the strength of that resistance, its actual effectiveness, is now underestimated."²

There is certainly no guarantee that the reformist path on which Gorbachev and his supporters have embarked will lead to successful political or, indeed, economic reform.³ But the changes in the political climate of the Soviet Union and, in some important respects, in the substance of Soviet politics have been far greater in Gorbachev's first three years than most Western observers dared to contemplate on the day of Konstantin Chernenko's death in March, 1985.

Leadership Change

One of the most important changes, facilitating a number of others, has been the remarkably rapid turnover within the top leadership team of the Party (by which I mean the full and candidate members of the Politburo and the

Secretaries of the Central Committee). Of the twenty-five people it embraces, only four (Vladimir Dolgikh, Vladimir Shcherbitsky, Mikhail Solomentsev, and Vitalii Vorotnikov) are both holding the same rank and doing the same job as they were on the eve of Chernenko's death. More than half of the team (fourteen out of twenty-five) have been brought into the leadership since Gorbachev's accession to the General Secretaryship. Among candidate members of the Politburo and Secretaries of the Central Committee, the turnover has been especially great. Whereas five of the present thirteen full members of the Politburo were already there in Chernenko's (and, indeed, Andropov's) time, only two of the seven candidate members were candidates then and as few as two out of the thirteen Secretaries of the Central Committee⁴ were in the Secretariat under Chernenko — Gorbachev himself and Dolgikh.

A broad non-Brezhnevite coalition has been built up and has supplanted most of the Brezhnev clients and allies who by the time of his death in 1982 held many top posts. It was Yuri Andropov who began to put that new coalition together during his fifteen months as General Secretary and while two of the people he promoted — Grigorii Romanov and Geidar Aliev — have already been dropped by Gorbachev, others who were newcomers in Andropov's time have enjoyed accelerated promotion. The most notable cases in point are Egor Ligachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov. As early as the April, 1985 plenum of the Central Committee Ligachev and Ryzhkov had become senior secretaries of the Central Committee and before the end of the year Ligachev was clearly

1 *Pravda*, February 19, 1988, p. 1.

2 *Moscow News*, No. 1, January 3, 1988, p. 3.

3 Richard E. Ericson brings out just how difficult a process the economic reform is in "The New Enterprise Law," *The Harriman Institute Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February, 1988.

4 As of March 11, 1988 — exactly three years after Gorbachev became General Secretary.



the de facto "second secretary" within the Party, while Ryzhkov had moved to the equally responsible and almost equally powerful post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers. As a new General Secretary — possessing great influence but far from total power over appointments — Gorbachev had to forge such alliances as were available to him. As time has passed, however, he has been able to bring more like-minded people and committed supporters into key positions.

The leadership as a whole is now a mixture of those with a strong commitment to reform and to Gorbachev, of more conditional allies, of fair-weather friends of the General Secretary, and of skeptics. Gorbachev has been particularly successful in getting like-minded people into the Secretariat, but he is not yet in such a strong position in the Politburo, though there, too, he is making ground. It is of interest that many of Gorbachev's strongest supporters are not clients in the sense in which Podgorny and Brezhnev were Khrushchev clients or Chernenko (especially) and Kunaev were Brezhnev clients. The "Gorbachevians" have not necessarily worked anything like so closely with Gorbachev prior to his picking them out for advancement. An example is Anatolii Dobrynin who, after his twenty-four years as Soviet Ambassador to Washington, became in 1986 a Secretary of the Central Committee and head of the International Department. A still more notable case is that of Aleksandr Yakovlev, who at the beginning of 1986 had not entered the top leadership team but by the end of June, 1987, was already a senior secretary of the Central Committee (a term I use to denote those who combine a Central Committee Secretaryship with full membership of the Politburo and who accordingly exercise wide supervisory responsibilities within the Secretariat). The mutual liking of, and alliance between, Gorbachev and Yakovlev dates back no further than Andropov's time. Yakovlev's recall to Moscow (in the first instance as Director of IMEMO, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations) from a ten-year dignified exile as Soviet ambassador to Canada followed immediately upon a visit Gorbachev paid to that country in 1983.

Though Gorbachev's position is stronger in the Secretariat than in the Politburo, he has been especially successful in placing his supporters in some of the most sensitive positions. Thus, Yakovlev is the overlord within the Secretariat of culture and the mass media. There his greatest and most effective power is the power to do nothing. By that I mean that whereas in the past the occupier of that job and his subordinates were only too ready to interfere to prevent or curtail the publication of unorthodox ideas, critical comment and the frank treatment of sensitive historical or current issues, Yakovlev has pursued a policy of benign non-intervention. That at least has been true on a day-to-day

basis, but at the same time (like Gorbachev himself) he has given discreet support to reform-oriented journals and to writers of reformist sentiments.

A second Gorbachev man in a key post is Georgii Razumovsky, the Secretary of the Central Committee who supervises the placement of party cadres. Though Ligachev is the senior secretary with oversight of that area of activity, Razumovsky's personal ties are to Gorbachev and a combination of the General Secretary and the junior secretary responsible for cadres tilts the balance of advantage in the making of party appointments in Gorbachev's direction.⁵ That is likely to be all the more true since the promotion of Razumovsky in February, 1988 to candidate membership of the Politburo.

A third important support and safeguard for Gorbachev's position follows from the elevation in 1987 to a Central Committee Secretaryship of Anatolii Luk'yanov and, more particularly, from the fact that he is supervising the Administrative Organs department of the Central Committee which oversees the military, the KGB and the legal system. Gorbachev's acquaintanceship with Luk'yanov dates back to the early 1950s when they overlapped in the Law Faculty of Moscow University. During Gorbachev's first year as General Secretary, Luk'yanov worked especially closely with him as the head of the Central Committee's General Department, which controls the flow of papers to the Politburo.

Although the obstacles in the path of the reforms Gorbachev wishes to undertake are indeed formidable and though he has foot-dragging colleagues as well as enthusiastic supporters, the General Secretary has shown immense political skill in changing the balance of power within the top leadership so quickly. While there is a tendency in the Soviet system for decisions to be implemented in an increasingly formalistic way as they descend through the party hierarchy, and while it is far easier to change leading personnel than to alter deeply-ingrained patterns of behavior and thought among party and state officials (and especially those at the lower and middle levels), the changes wrought by Gorbachev in the Central Committee apparatus should not be underestimated. They are among his few, but possibly decisive, trumps in a very serious game in which many of the cards are stacked against the success of radical reform.

"Socialist Pluralism"

Though no General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party has a completely free hand in redefining the official ideology, he has more opportunities than anyone else to exercise influence on it in the process of selection from the works of Marx and Lenin, in the "creative development" of Marxism-Leninism and in imparting different meanings to

⁵ Jerry Hough makes a similar point in "Gorbachev Consolidating Power" in *Problems of Communism*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, July-August, 1987, pp. 21-43, at p. 30.

old terms within the Soviet political lexicon. While every General Secretary has portrayed himself as a faithful follower of Lenin, Gorbachev has gone further than any in disinterring the Lenin of the New Economic Policy (NEP) period which was characterized by a greater political tolerance as well as by concessions to the market. He has at the same time expunged many of the Stalinist overtones which have been attached to the vocabulary of Marx and Lenin and, above all, has encouraged debate within the ideology itself. To a certain extent such argument was already going on during the Brezhnev years, but it was between the lines rather than on them. While *glasnost'* should certainly not be equated with total freedom of publication, it has already not only greatly increased the dissemination of information but also permitted the most wide-ranging political debate to have taken place in the Soviet Union since the mid-1920s.

Of the numerous ideological innovations which, along with *glasnost'*, are among the most concrete political changes to have occurred over the past three years, none is more remarkable than Gorbachev's espousal of the concept of "socialist pluralism." Soviet leaders and ideologists had been attacking the concept of pluralism with special vehemence ever since it was embraced by Communist reformers in Czechoslovakia before and during the "Prague Spring," and the support of "Eurocommunists" in the 1970s for what they envisaged as a socialist pluralism was condemned with equal vigor. Yet in 1987 Gorbachev became the first leader in Soviet history to use the term "pluralism" — albeit qualified by the adjective "socialist" — other than as a term of abuse. This was a clear case of Gorbachev leading from the front and taking a deliberate decision to break old taboos because he realized that to attack "pluralism" was to play into the hands of his domestic enemies who would like to stifle debate and innovative thought. In so doing, he was taking the advice of some of his most reform-minded intellectual advisers and challenging prevailing party doctrine.

The manner in which Gorbachev did this, as well as the matter, is worth special attention. The concept of "socialist pluralism" was too radical a departure from previous Soviet doctrine to be introduced at once into a speech with the authoritative character of an official Central Committee report. Therefore, it was dropped, in an anodyne but by no means casual way, into a conversation which Gorbachev had with leading figures in the mass media and creative unions in July, 1987. The context was that of opening up the columns of Soviet newspapers to a wider range of writers in order that "the whole of socialist pluralism, so to speak, is present."⁶ It was used again in September last year when Gorbachev responded to a French Communist's praise for

the greater "pluralism of opinion" which he saw as being "now more and more openly tolerated" in Soviet society by agreeing with the sentiment but insisting on the addition of the adjective, "socialist," which meant, said Gorbachev, that "our democracy and our pluralism are based on our socialist values."⁷

By using the term, however fleetingly (and in the same sense in which he had first employed it at his meeting with the writers) in his book, *Perestroika*, published late last year, Gorbachev provided confirmation — for anyone who needed it — that "pluralism" was no slip of the tongue.⁸ Use of the word when Gorbachev was speaking for himself and its employment in a formal address to the Central Committee are two very different things. Once, however, Gorbachev had given the concept his personal imprimatur, it was quickly taken up in newspaper articles by some of the more radical reformers, although pointedly eschewed by a number of senior figures in the Politburo.

While the average Soviet citizen probably could not care less whether Gorbachev uses the term "pluralism" positively or negatively, that does not mean that this change of line is of no consequence. In any society, but especially one with an official ideology as comprehensive as Marxism-Leninism, ideological constructs can facilitate or constrict certain types of political action and widen or narrow the scope for political debate. For orthodox Soviet ideologists who have been anathematizing the concept of pluralism for more years than they care to remember, Gorbachev's endorsement of "socialist pluralism" came as an even greater shock than the adoption as a central principle of Soviet socialism of the idea of "self-management" (which these same ideologists had been condemning for a generation as a revisionist, Yugoslav notion). Talking with Soviet philosophers and jurists immediately after Gorbachev's meeting with a group of French public figures in Moscow last September, I found (alongside widespread support for Gorbachev and *perestroika*) an unwillingness on the part of some to accept that Gorbachev's endorsement of the term "socialist pluralism" was a quite deliberate decision. "I am sure he only said it out of politeness to his French guests," was the response of one woman philosopher.

But Gorbachev does not use key words so carelessly. In a speech to the Central Committee plenum this February he made that clear to all when he said: "For the first time in many decades we are really experiencing a socialist pluralism of opinion."⁹ While he immediately went on to note that this phenomenon (and, by implication, the concept) was evaluated in different ways, he left his listeners in no doubt that his own attitude toward it was a positive one. In the space of eight months what had seemed to some to be no more than a throwaway remark had come close to being

6 *Pravda*, July 15, 1987, pp. 1-2, at p. 2.

7 *Pravda*, September 30, 1987, p. 1.

8 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World* (Collins, London, 1987), p. 77.

9 *Pravda*, February 19, 1988, p. 1.

elevated into new party doctrine, the traditional "monist" theory of the Soviet state and oft-repeated claim of "monolithic unity" of the party and the people notwithstanding. Having hinted that the concept has not gone unchallenged within the higher party echelons, Gorbachev has called for its further analysis and clarification. That will no doubt be another large bone of contention in the struggle between different political tendencies within the apparatus and the intelligentsia. However, the fact that Gorbachev has now more authoritatively than hitherto endorsed the principle of "socialist pluralism" is a considerable boost for the more radical Soviet political reformers.

While it would be quite wrong to see this even in theory as other than a limited pluralism (Gorbachev himself has made it plain that it must be a "pluralism" within the limits of "socialism" — though the latter concept, too, can be an elastic one if a Communist Party leadership wants it to be), it represents a remarkable change in the language of Soviet political discourse. In terms of Soviet practice, one must be more cautious, for it would still be absurd to describe the system as one of a pluralist type. It has, however, already become a *more enlightened authoritarian regime* and one in which some *elements of pluralism* are to be found. These include the clear differences of political orientation among various newspapers and journals (with, for instance *Molodaya gvardiya* and *Moskva* close to the conservative and nationalist end of the political spectrum and *Ogonek* and *Novy mir* at the reformist or liberal end) and the growth of many thousands of unofficial groups, from those of radical reformist disposition to the nationalist Pamyat' society.¹⁰

The Political Reform Agenda

The term, "socialist pluralism," important ideologically though it is, must be kept in perspective. It is still far from being the most central concept of the Soviet reformers and of Gorbachev personally. The most hard-worked concept remains the overarching one of *perestroika*, which means very different things to different people. Practically every Soviet citizen who makes a public utterance on *perestroika* is for it, but that is because to some it means no more than a reorganization, to others a serious economic restructuring and for yet others what amounts to a spiritual reformation. *Perestroika* may also, according to the eye of the beholder, mean the crack-down on alcohol consumption, the imposition of stricter discipline or the settling of old scores. For Gorbachev it signifies both radical and comprehensive reform, embracing the political as well as the economic system, and taking in several other key notions: *glasnost'* which he, along with the more serious reformers, appears to see not

only as a means of preparing public opinion for change by exposing past crimes and present gross inefficiency but also as a valuable end in itself; *demokratizatsiya* which for Gorbachev appears to mean essentially greater openness plus more popular participation and accountability — hence his support for competitive elections, albeit within definite limits; and *uskorenie*, a term which is now rather less in vogue than during the first eighteen months of the Gorbachev era but which refers to the need to get the economy moving again after the stagnation of the Brezhnev years. It is perhaps of more than passing interest that none of these new key concepts has its origins in Marxism-Leninism, an observation which, of course, applies all the more forcefully to the still newer notion in the Soviet context of *pluralism*.

If *perestroika* is the umbrella concept under which all other elements of Soviet reform must be fitted, *glasnost'* (to a much greater degree than, for example, economic reform which thus far remains mainly on paper) is its most visible manifestation. Gorbachev put *glasnost'* on the Soviet political agenda in a major speech three months before he became General Secretary¹¹ and in each successive year since then the boundaries of critical analysis and scope for fresh thought have been pushed wider. While the link between the change at the top and this development is clear, it would be quite wrong to see *glasnost'* as entirely, or perhaps even mainly, a top-down phenomenon. Soviet intellectuals have seized the opportunity to advance *their* views and to take advantage of the new possibilities of influencing the political agenda and policy outcomes.

The current reexamination of Soviet history is one example of an issue where Gorbachev has changed his position under the influence of the views of his natural allies. Knowing how divisive the entire Stalin issue was (Soviet reformers recognize, even as they deplore, the esteem in which Stalin is still held by many millions of Soviet citizens), Gorbachev's initial reaction was to attempt to concentrate upon the issues which would unite, rather than divide, the Soviet population. Given the strength of feeling about the Stalin era on both sides, but especially on the part of the anti-Stalinists who are Gorbachev's staunchest supporters, Gorbachev has come to see that the issue can be avoided only at the expense of decisively undermining *glasnost'*. Furthermore, perhaps he now recognizes a prolonged struggle to be unavoidable and sees that a more serious critical analysis of the Stalin era than that offered by Khrushchev (not to speak of Brezhnev) may even be a precondition of successful reform and that at the very least it will deal a blow to its enemies.

Elements of historical *glasnost'* as an aid to reform include the positive reevaluation of NEP and, increasingly, of

10 According to a Soviet author, "there are as many as 30,000 independent social groups and associations in the Soviet Union now." He observes that "at present, non-official groups are considered by our society as a fact of pluralist reality," but also poses the question: "Can we treat that reality in a normal and civilized way, in keeping with the spirit of democratization?" See Eduard Khamidulin, "Pluralism Soviet Style," in *Moscow News*, No. 9, February 28, 1988, p. 5.

11 M.S. Gorbachev, *Zhivoe tvorchestvo naroda* (Politizdat, Moscow, 1984), p. 30.

Bukharin (including his legal rehabilitation) — and, more recently, an objective assessment of the Khrushchev years. The first-ever such serious analysis to appear in a Soviet publication — one in which Khrushchev's virtues and shortcomings and, more surprisingly, his political battles within the party leadership are discussed in the kind of detail previously to be found only in Western publications — has recently appeared in the Writers' Union weekly newspaper, *Literaturnaya gazeta*. Written by Fedor Burlatsky, who in the early 1960s worked as a speech-writer for Khrushchev, it occupies an entire page of the newspaper and offers interesting reflections and insights on Khrushchev's character.¹² It also carries some implicit advice for Gorbachev. The way for a leader to carry out a successful and consistent reform, suggests Burlatsky, is to bring together a team of specialists — mainly scholars and public figures — working directly under him, rather than entrust the conceptual formulation of the reform to the apparatus which cannot be expected to support limitations on its power but, on the contrary, will find ways of protecting it. Burlatsky's is but an example among many of articles containing both fresh information and independent political judgements of a kind which could not previously be printed in the Soviet Union but which are now appearing in a wide variety of Soviet publications. It is one measure of the change that in the not too distant past the same author was not able to mention Khrushchev's name in print, even when he was writing about the Cuban missile crisis.

At a meeting with leading figures in the Soviet mass media this January, Gorbachev said: "We are for *glasnost*' without reservation or limitations, but for *glasnost*' in the interests of socialism."¹³ Since it is ultimately the Communist Party leadership which defines what is, and what is not, "in the interests" of socialism, that does in fact represent a significant limitation upon *glasnost*'. Yet, it is nevertheless clear that Gorbachev favors a substantially greater amount of frankness and openness than has been characteristic of Soviet political and social life since the 1920s.

Gorbachev, at the same meeting, reiterated his desire to "push forward the process of democratization in the party," noting, rightly, that "if such processes do not take place in the party, then they will not happen in society either."¹⁴ He distinguished Soviet-style "democratization" from Western democracy by stressing also the extension of the electoral principle to economic institutions, referring to the recently established policy of election of factory managers, foremen and team leaders by the members of the relevant work collectives.

For intellectuals on the reform wing of the party, the key issue remains the *institutionalization* of changes which up to

the present may be deemed atmospheric, rhetorical and reversible. A strikingly innovative manifestation of such views from within an official, reform-minded body was the call at the 1987 annual conference of the Soviet Association of Political Sciences for "the creation of a socialist 'theory of checks and balances.'" The dreadful consequences of unchecked power are all too clear to many Soviet reformers, but for them to use the language of checks and balances and to go on to urge study of the experience in this regard of "the bourgeois state system" and of Western theory on the subject is something quite new even for the main journal of Soviet academic lawyers.¹⁵

Many Soviet reformers, and especially those to be found in the ranks of jurists, are intent upon enhancing the role of legal norms in Soviet life and they support the introduction of specific legislation on the mass media as well as what would amount to a "freedom of information act," defining both state secrets (which hitherto have been left vague and potentially all-embracing) and the rights of citizens to get information from the state. These measures are already being discussed by specialists, as also are draft proposals for a new electoral law. Different views are being promoted in the behind-the-scenes arguments, but how radical a departure these various pieces of legislation will represent from past Soviet theory and especially practice will depend upon the result of the political battle currently being waged between reformers and conservatives within the party. The outcome is unlikely to be very clear until after the June, 1988 party conference — the major forum for further elaboration of political as well as economic reform — has come and gone. Gorbachev himself has said that "the issues of democratization will be the main and central" ones at the party conference, and he has declared that the electoral system, reform of the courts and law reform more generally will be among the subjects considered under that rubric.¹⁶

Many of the reformers set considerable store upon competitive elections for party offices and for deputies to soviets. Gorbachev first gave his explicit support to this idea at the January plenum of the Central Committee in 1987. He argued that there should be more than one candidate for party secretaryships (including first secretaryships) at all levels of the party from the district to the union republican. Time will tell whether it is the competitive principle as such which attracts him or whether he sees its introduction in more instrumental terms as a way of removing corrupt or unresponsive leaders and those hostile to him and to *perestroika*. At any rate, he spoke more vaguely when he turned his consideration at the January, 1987 plenum to "the central leading bodies of the party," saying that in the

12 *Literaturnaya gazeta*, February 24, 1988, p. 14.

13 *Pravda*, January 13, 1988, pp. 1-3, at p. 2.

14 *Ibid.*

15 S.E. Deitsev and I.G. Shablinskii, "Rol' politicheskikh institutov v uskorenii sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya," in *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, No. 7, July, 1987, pp. 118-120, at p. 119.

16 *Pravda*, January 13, 1988, p. 2.

opinion of the Politburo the principle of "further democratization" should apply also to their formation and that this was "wholly logical."¹⁷

It is, however, not difficult to see why Gorbachev should be in no immediate hurry to apply this principle at the very top of the party hierarchy. A majority of members of the Central Committee are people who were already there in Brezhnev's time, although this will almost certainly cease to be the case after the June conference when officials who, in the interval since the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in early 1986, have acquired positions which normally carry Central Committee membership can expect elevation to that rank and the acquisition of the extra political authority it brings. Given the current composition of the Central Committee, it is far from evident that Gorbachev and his allies would have fared better in his first three years as General Secretary if the Politburo and Secretariat had been chosen, in a genuinely competitive election, by the Central Committee membership as a whole, rather than being co-opted from above in a process which gives the General Secretary a greater say than that of any other individual among his colleagues.

Thus, the attitude of reformers to the extension of the electoral principle all the way up to the top of the party hierarchy is somewhat akin to Saint Augustine's prayer to God to grant him chastity: "Give me chastity and continency, but do not give it yet!" They would like to see Gorbachev consolidate his power and authority further and, in particular, they would like to see more committed reformers on the Central Committee before they would wish to have that body choose the General Secretary and other members of the Politburo and Secretariat in truly competitive elections. Already these leaders are officially "elected" at plenary sessions of the Central Committee, but the practice has been for the Politburo to present a name or list of names to the Central Committee and for that larger body to provide a unanimous endorsement.

Extrapolating points from Gorbachev's speech to the February, 1988 Central Committee plenum, *Moscow News* — one of the flagships of *glasnost'*, selling 250,000 copies weekly in its Russian-language edition and read by several million Soviet citizens — has summarized the agenda for political reform to be considered at the party conference in June as comprising the following items: enhancing the role of the soviets; improving the electoral system; delimiting the functions of party and state bodies; increasing participation by public organizations in the solution of state issues; developing ties among the republics and consolidating their rights.¹⁸ All of these issues, only some of which could be discussed here, are indeed now on the political agenda and though they are far too large to be in any meaningful sense resolved this year, the direction in which the party leader-

ship intends to move on them is likely to become much clearer in the coming months.

Correlation of Forces

I have noted earlier in this article the way and the extent to which Gorbachev has strengthened his position within the highest echelons of the party organization, but some attention, however briefly, must be paid to the broader issue of the "correlation of forces" (to use a Soviet phrase which is normally applied to the relative strength of the two superpowers in the international arena) in Soviet society in the struggle for and against reform. It would appear that both the social and the political bases for *perestroika* are rather narrow, but also that there is greater support for all its aspects among well-qualified professional people than among other social groups, and that among manual workers, where skepticism is quite widespread, there may be broader support for political than for economic reform.

The intelligentsia, in spite of many internal cleavages and diverse views, has emerged quite clearly as the social group most supportive of political and economic reform. Among manual workers, these two dimensions of reform are more sharply differentiated. The economic reform introduces job insecurity for the Soviet work force after many years in which not only employment, but employment in the same enterprise was guaranteed, and thus seems to be taking an existing right away from them. The political reform envisaged by the more radical proponents of *perestroika* offers workers, in common with other citizens, an extension of their rights. It provides, for example, at least a veto against oppressive bosses or lazy or incompetent deputies with the introduction of competitive elections (which have already become increasingly common in the workplace for foremen and team leaders).

Moreover, there is one sense in which *glasnost'* is even more in the interests of workers than of the intellectuals. Whereas the intelligentsia — through informal networks, more contact with foreigners, easier access to the special sections of libraries, knowledge of foreign-language literature and somewhat better (albeit still very limited) opportunities for foreign travel — has had means of picking up a lot of political information which remained unpublished in the Soviet Union in the pre-*glasnost'* years, workers are more dependent on the official mass media. The longer *glasnost'* continues, the less they are likely to be satisfied with a return to the boring catalogue of achievements and the avoidance of the problems of real life characteristic of the mass media in Brezhnev's time.

The reformers have to make the most of that aspect of current developments, however, since there remains a lack of widespread popular enthusiasm for *perestroika*, resulting

¹⁷ *Pravda*, January 28, 1987, pp. 1-5, at p. 3.

¹⁸ *Moscow News*, No. 10, March 6, 1988, p. 8.

from worries concerning the economic reform and (for many) irritation about the long lines for alcohol. Moreover, whereas creative writers or social scientists benefit directly in terms of work satisfaction from being able to publish much more of what they want to say, the benefit to workers is indirect. Thus, daunting though it is, the task of greatly increasing the supply of foodstuffs and consumer goods in the shops is rightly seen by many reformers as essential if the support of the people as a whole for *perestroika* is to become as solid as Gorbachev often claims it to be.

Within the party apparatus, it is clear that there is more support for radical reform at the top than in the middle and bottom. One prominent Soviet reformer described the present period to me as one of "dual power," adding: "The leadership is for *perestroika* and the apparatus is against." That is an oversimplification. The leadership is united for *perestroika* only in the sense that different members of the Politburo mean different things by that same word, and the apparatus contains at least an enlightened minority of officials. Yet the oversimplification is in the right direction. The term "dual power" (recalling the period in 1917 when power was divided *de facto* between the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government) was actually used in print by the Soviet literary critic, Andrei Nuykin, in the journal *Novy mir* this January. (It is characteristic of the speed with which things have moved in the realm of *glasnost'* that the same issue contained the first installment of Boris Pasternak's novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, yet for many Soviet readers Nuykin's article was the greater sensation.) Quite explicitly drawing the contemporary parallel with 1917, Nuykin wrote that for "the second time in the twentieth century" Russia was experiencing the curious situation of a kind of "dual power," one in which there was, in effect, a stalemate between the pro-reform and anti-reform forces with neither able to achieve a decisive victory over the other.¹⁹ That, too, is a generalization containing a large element of truth. Following the relative success of the reformers at the January and June plenums of 1987, something of a conservative backlash took place as it became clear just how important for the fate of reform the run-up period to the June, 1988 party conference would be.

Armenian-Azeri Clashes

Given the relative precariousness of the balance of social and political forces, and given the number of things that can go wrong, it would be rash to bet heavily on the success of political reform in the Soviet Union. Recent events in the Caucasus provide ample confirmation of de Tocqueville's dictum that the most dangerous time for an authoritarian regime is when it begins to reform itself. That same early stage of development is also the most difficult time for a reformist leader. The violence between Azeris and Ar-

menians will certainly be used in a whispering campaign against Gorbachev by his party opponents who will see the demonstrations and subsequent developments as a direct result of raising dangerous expectations through promises of democratization and an excess of openness, even though the lack of initial full reporting made matters worse. Azeris, on the basis of rumors of violent attacks on their people, responded to massive but overwhelmingly peaceful Armenian demonstrations with atrocities.

The latent national tensions are among the most severe problems Gorbachev has inherited and, to an even greater extent than other areas of policy, they do not permit solutions which can satisfy one significant group without offending another. Ethnic group clashes were the last thing Gorbachev and Soviet reformers needed just a few months in advance of the first all-union party conference since 1941. They will not be the only unintended consequences of *perestroika*.

Yet, even though the initial effect of these recent events has been to put yet another obstacle in the path of reform, it should not be ruled out that Gorbachev will snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. He has done it before. The uninterrupted flight to Red Square in May, 1987 of the young West German pilot, Mathias Rust, could easily have been damaging for a Soviet General Secretary who is also, *ex officio*, Chairman of the Defense Council. In fact, Gorbachev skillfully used the opportunity to change the Minister of Defense and to strengthen his control over the armed forces. Gorbachev has already announced that the next Central Committee plenary session will be devoted to the nationalities question and he may well argue that more political reform, including a somewhat greater devolution of power to the republics and other national areas administered by indigenous groups, is the way to forestall ethnic problems. (Yugoslav experience makes that an uncertain proposition, and the particular problem between Azeris and Armenians would not in itself be solved in this way since the conflict is not primarily with Moscow but between two neighboring union republics.) The political responsibility for dealing with the problem in the Caucasus has already been spread well beyond Gorbachev's own supporters within the leadership. Vladimir Dolgikh was dispatched along with Gorbachev's ally, Anatolii Luk'yanov, to Armenia and Petr Demichev (like Dolgikh, a holdover in the leadership from Brezhnev's time) to Azerbaijan, a choice of troubleshooters which may also be an effective way of limiting the damage to Gorbachev.

Obstacles and Opportunities

Although Soviet reformers face immense obstacles and though Gorbachev's consolidation of his power still has some way to go and may not as yet be decisive, it is worth

19 Andrei Nuykin, "Idealy ili interesy" in *Novy mir*, No. 1, January, 1988, pp. 190-211, at p. 210.

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reiterating how much he has already achieved. The Soviet Union is now a country in intellectual ferment and the scene of intense political as well as cultural activity. It is already, as I have noted, a more enlightened authoritarian regime and one in which some elements of pluralism may be discerned. For some time to come, it is highly likely to remain a regime in which a great deal of power is concentrated in the highest echelons of the Communist Party. Whereas in the past, that has often been an obstacle to reform, today it assists it. The social "base" for reform may still be narrow, but the entire "base" and "superstructure" architectural metaphor is of very limited help in the analysis of Communist politics. The power of political structures in Communist systems remains — even by comparison with other political systems — *relatively independent* of society (though in conditions of *perestroika* and *glasnost* the degree of interdependence is increasing).

Thus, it is highly relevant to return to the speed with which Gorbachev has already moved with policy innovation and with personnel change and to see in this an indication of his skill in handling the levers of power. Though the next two or three years are likely to be difficult ones for him, Western observers who assume that he will either be overthrown or be forced to retreat from the new policies he has put on the Soviet agenda are being, in the first case, too melodramatic, and in the second, excessively skeptical. So far as dismissal is concerned, Gorbachev knows something Khrushchev did not know — that a General Secretary can indeed be removed — and he will not leave someone else to mind the shop to the extent that Khrushchev did during his travels of 1964. As for retreat, where could he retreat to? If he had been prepared to preside over the Soviet Union's genteel decline, to allow it to be overtaken first by one Third World country and then another, he could have adopted a more conciliatory and less assertive and risk-laden domestic policy from the outset. But Gorbachev was convinced even before he became General Secretary that so far as his country

was concerned, the risks of not reforming outweighed the risks inherent in reform. Some of the most capable people in the Soviet Union, many of whose careers have advanced under Gorbachev, have reached the same conclusion.

The lack of a really viable alternative to the domestic and foreign policies on which Gorbachev has embarked, his ability to make a greater impact on policy than anyone else in the Soviet Union (attributes both of the power of the office of General Secretary and of Gorbachev's skill in deploying that power) and his comparative youth (he is more than ten years younger than the most obvious alternative General Secretary in the Politburo, Ligachev) all make it more likely than not that by the beginning of the 1990s, Gorbachev will have strengthened his power further.

There are many in the West and quite a few in the Soviet Union who would dispute that and who fear, or hope, that Gorbachev will in fact be removed from office before the beginning of the next decade. Certainly the next few years are likely to be difficult and crucial ones for him — and for the fate of Soviet reform. But provided his physical health holds, Gorbachev is likely to be in as strong a position by the end of the Twenty-Eighth Party Congress in 1991 (six years after becoming General Secretary) as Brezhnev was after the Twenty-Fifth Congress in 1976 (twelve years after becoming party leader). If and when that happens, there is a real possibility that the Gorbachev era will become the most constructive time of improvement in Soviet history.

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